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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 000142

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CHECHEN REFUGEE CONDITIONS IN ISTANBUL

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. The murder in Istanbul between October 2008 and February 2009 of three Chechens with alleged terrorist ties prompted speculation by news outlets and local Chechen refugees that Russia or Chechen governor Ramzan Kadyrov might be involved. Contacts also reported on the difficult conditions in the Chechen refugee camps, which are supported solely by donations from Chechnya. End Summary.

12. (U) In early March, Turkish press reported on the murder of Chechen "resistance commander" Ali Osaev, who was killed in late February in Istanbul. Osaev was reportedly the third Chechen killed in Istanbul in the prior five months. An aide to Osaev claimed to Turkish news that the murders were the work of the Russian FSB or people associated with Chechen governor Kadyrov. He stressed the attacks were not the result of "internal fighting" among Chechens.

13. (U) Renewed fighting in Chechnya since 1999 has resulted in an ongoing outflow of refugees to neighboring countries. Some Chechens fled to Turkey, specifically Istanbul and Ankara, where an estimated 600 plus women, children, and men continue to reside, of which 400 live in camps. Nearly all Chechen refugees are living illegally in Turkey, where their status is purgatorial: Turkey recognizes them neither as asylum seekers from the East (because they are from Russia, a European country), nor as qualified refugees from Europe (possibly due to rumored negotiations with Russia). Instead, the GOT refers to Chechen refugees as "guests" in the country -- a descriptor that has no legal significance and permits the GOT to avoid resolving their status.

14. (C) Professor Evren Balta of Yildiz University, who completed her doctoral research on issues pertaining to the Chechen migrants in Turkey, provided us with additional insight into the Chechen community in Istanbul. Three informally maintained camps for Chechen refugees are located in the municipalities of Umraniye, Fenerbahce, and Baykoz, and provide housing to approximately 400 people total, who rely heavily on donations and supplies from Chechnya for survival. According to Balta, the GOT has at times prevented donations from entering the country, supposedly due to secret agreements between Turkey and Russia. The camps clearly are dangerous places; according to Balta, the Baykoz camp was the only one without a murder in the last five months.

15. (U) According to human rights academic Katherine Layton, who specializes in Chechen issues, social relationships especially have been affected by the war. Russian strategists have for years openly conducted a "divide and rule" policy, she said. Because the Chechen social system is clan and tribe-based, differences occurring naturally within

this system have been exploited. Social positions and relationships are now substantially defined by "patriot" or "traitor" classifications. Layton reported that social life in refugee camps in Istanbul is especially strained by these conditions.

¶6. (U) According to UNHCR documentation, the Chechens have faced other challenges during their time in Turkey, such as:

- In June 2004, during the NATO summit in Istanbul, police raided private apartments and refugee camps, arrested up to 35 Chechens, and detained them for up to three months without charges.
 - In December 2004, shortly before Russian President Putin arrived in Turkey for diplomatic talks, masked police raided private apartments and arrested up to 20 Chechens, including two women. No one was charged.
 - In April 2005, police discovered an un-detonated car bomb outside of the Baykoz camp. No one was arrested.
 - After 2004, unidentified individuals visited the camps, promising to resolve refugee status issues. It is not clear with what organizations these visitors were affiliated, as they offered only vague information. UNHCR considers these visitors to have been on "information search missions" on behalf of unknown principals.
- Wiener